

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

The future is now

By John Van Nostrand

Wednesday, a select group of Colby and Thomas County residents were invited to attend a scenario building meeting to vision what Colby could look like in the year 2017.

The people in attendance were first asked to do three things. On one sheet of paper, the people were asked to write down the things they liked about Colby. On another piece of paper, they were asked to write down the things that Colby struggles with. Then they were to write down what has to change to improve the items on the struggle list.

The internal debate within Colby's health care providers topped the list of concerns. That's no surprise considering the number of years it has lasted and what it has done to the town. Relationships have been stressed. Residents have been divided as either for or against the health care providers involved.

Some people commented that if that dispute is not resolved, Colby will struggle even more with the next problem — no matter what it is. That's not good for our future.

But it was more than just the dispute over health care. Mental-ity of our residents was discussed too.

Some people said Colby is one of those towns that wants to do what it has always done because it fears change. Another comment about change was some people want to improve the town, but don't want the mechanics of the improvement to change them (they don't want to pay for it, but it's OK for the next guy to pay for it).

That can be implied that we don't want to sacrifice anything for the good of the town. Colby Community College's \$15 million wellness center proposal earlier this year was a subtle example. It was defeated in the April election.

Not directly related to the meeting, but at one table, the people had written a list of people who have moved out of town during the past year. Some of the people on that list were longtime Colby residents. It would be interesting to see the reasons why those people packed up and left. Would they have written down the same things the people at the meeting did?

The people invited to the meeting had some level of leadership or influence in the town. We hope those people show good leadership skills and use the information presented in a way to make Colby even better long before 2017.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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Good money, terrible job

Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts



Last year I wrote a column about summer jobs and the terrible job a friend talked me into. The reason I got to thinking about it again is because it's summer and for many of our young people, it's time to get a job for spending money.

It was during the summer of my junior year in high school, and my friend, Carol Lansford, talked me into taking a job that she said would be a real money-maker — detassling corn.

Having never done anything like that, I thought it would be great! My buddy told me we would be making \$3 an hour (which was a very good wage in 1968) and we could work on our tans.

One of the downsides, though, was we had to be up and going by 5 a.m. and worked until about 6 p.m. everyday — even on Saturdays and Sundays. Still, I wasn't too concerned because it would only be temporary — maybe six weeks max.

I started visualizing all the positive things about this job. For instance, the ways to spend the money (I hadn't made yet) and the great tan I could show off.

Anyway, the big day finally arrived. I had a lunch and drink packed, wore my shorts, T-shirt and had a swimming suit top underneath.

My friend and I arrived at the high school, where the bus was waiting to pick us up, along with about 30 to 40 other people I had never seen before. By 6 a.m., we got to our destination, which was a cornfield about 30 miles from home.

As we all piled out of the bus, I was still pretty excited about this job opportunity — after all, my friend had been detassling corn for a couple of summers already.

After getting our final instructions from the foreman, we all headed into the cornfield. Each of us was assigned a different row to start in and, those of us who were new had a person assisting us in the proper way to detassle the corn.

Still excited about all the money I was going to make, I was an apt student watching how it was done. Once the trainer thought we were good enough, we were on our own detassling our little hearts out.

For those who complain about the humidity in

northwest Kansas, they might think again about living in central Illinois. The humidity there gets as high as the temperature. I can remember many times getting out of the shower and not being able to dry off. The humidity there is bad.

Anyway, within a couple of hours after starting, I was beginning to wonder why I agreed to do it. It was miserable. It was hot, humid, and the bugs were thick in those fields, not to mention I was getting scratches all over from the corn.

By noon, it was time for a lunch break. Unfortunately, there were really no good places to sit and enjoy the time off. It was so humid, I didn't feel like eating and I would have given anything for a nice shade tree, but those were all taken up by the more experienced detassling crews.

As I walked out of the cornfield into an open area, there was my buddy, just grinning from ear to ear and bouncing over to have lunch with me. I can vividly remember how happy she looked and she had this smile that wouldn't stop. Not wanting to disappoint her, I struggled to put a smile on my face too as she asked me what I thought of the job so far.

What I wanted to say and what I did say were certainly not the same.

"Oh, it's going good," I told her, as the sweat poured down my face and my legs were bleeding from the bug bites and arms scratched up from the corn stocks.

As we sat eating our lunch together, I couldn't help but notice that she didn't have a mark on her.

"Hey Carol," I said, "what's up with

that?... You don't have a mark on you." She looked down at her arms and legs and said, "oh yes I do... see here's a scratch on my arm."

Great, one scratch and here I was looking like I had been attacked by a dozen cats.

After a 30-minute lunch break, it was back to work. Not wanting to look whimpy, I acted like I couldn't wait to hit the old cornfield again and detassle some more corn.

"Oh boy!," I said to my friend, "the day is half over." As I started working again, all of sudden I realized that my upper arms were beginning to ache. Doing all that reaching was agonizing.

By about 3 p.m., I was thinking this job wasn't worth it. No matter how hard I tried to think about the short-term pain for long-term gain — meaning all the money I planned to make — it wasn't working.

At the end of the day, I couldn't believe my eyes...my buddy came bouncing out of the field almost as if she had just gotten there.

"What do you want to do tonight?," she asked. "Maybe we can go drag Main or see a movie...What do you think?"

All I wanted to do was get to a cool place and sleep.

I lasted almost a week detassling corn with more than 95 percent of my body covered in mosquito other insect bites and scratches. My tender, sore muscles lasted about five days and even though my buddy tried to convince me it would get better — I told her I wasn't doing it anymore.

Suffice to say, it was one of those jobs that I admired people for doing, but it was too much for me.

I swore I would never do that kind of hard labor ever again, but about 15 years later I found myself working as a USDA potato inspector in Idaho. It was like *deja vu* — with the only difference being I completed the entire summer. Still, let's leave that one for another day.

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Fridays.

Your turn

Saving Kansas water

Lloyd Wiersma Wamego

The state of Kansas has a water problem that can be summed up in six words, "too much, too little, too bad."

Too much results in floods. Too little results in drought. Both are bad but in some ways drought is worse because it effects more people. Both would not be as bad if we make the soil absorb more rainfall. Deep subsoiling is one way to do that.

There are some facts about water and dirt that are important. Due to capillary action water in the soil is either going down or coming back up. But if the water goes deep enough, then it will not come back up. This point in most soils is about four feed down and some refer to this point as the evaporation point. Water that gets below the evaporation point goes on down to restore underground water. Some of the water may be stopped on the way down by rock or shale formations and reactivate our springs and keep water running in our rivers. According to one

study, out of 20 inches of rainfall in western Kansas, less than .2 of an inch gets below the evaporation point. If we can increase that amount then we would start to restore our underground water supply.

In 1957, I owned a land improvement company and experimented with subsoiling. I thought it showed promise so I wrote a letter to the Topeka Capital Journal. The editor devoted an entire editorial endorsing the idea. Other people, including then Gov. Dick Docking, also thought the idea had merit. Gov. Docking was going to appoint me to the state water board until he learned that the Kansas legislators had passed a law requiring all board members must have college degrees. We have a lot of people in the state with college degrees and yet in 1951 we had a flood.

Five years later in 1956 the Missouri River was running so low that they had to dredge to maintain one-way barge traffic. "Too much, too little, too bad." In 1993 we had another major flood and last year, again, the Missouri River did

not have enough water to maintain barge traffic. Now, in the spring of 2007, it has turned wet and some areas have flooding problems while some ethanol plants do not have enough water to expand. Even though we have all these people with college degrees we still have a water problem. For the good of the state I think that some of us that do not have college degrees need to get involved.

I may not be qualified to serve on the water board, but I can still write letters. This is the first of a series of letters I intend to send to every newspaper in the state. I had some positive results from writing the letters in 1957 so I am going to try it again.

It will benefit everyone in the state if we store more water underground and have a plentiful water supply. Deep subsoiling is one way to do that but it is unfair to expect the landowners to bear the cost.

If we can use taxpayer dollars to build big dams then why not pay landowners to subsoil their land?

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce

Tinsley

